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DEPARTEMENT FOR EAP/ANP AND DS/IP/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [WS](#)

SUBJECT: PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION AT EMBASSY OVER ARREST OF ASSOCIATE
MINISTER JOE KEIL IN THE U.S.

11. Summary: At 10:00am November 10 approximately 2,000 peaceful protesters marched to the Embassy to deliver a petition for the release of Associate Cabinet Minister and prominent businessman Hans Joachim (Joe) Keil. Mr. Keil was arrested in September in the U.S. on suspicion of passport fraud. The protest, dubbed the "Free Joe March", began at the public grounds of the Government Building and went along the main roads to the Embassy, several blocks away. The march organizers presented a petition to the Acting Charge calling for Mr. Keil's case to be dropped. After a few speeches the protesters dispersed peacefully. This is the first protest against the Embassy since it opened 20 years ago, according to senior LES staff. (Despite our lack of practice all went well.) End Summary.

March banners/Anti-US Sentiment

12. The march, organized by the U.S. Veterans of Samoa Association and the Keil family and friends, included a number of civic and business organizations, government employees and students. The Speaker of the House participated and spoke of his family ties to Mr. Keil; the Deputy Prime Minister attended but did not speak. Both marched as "concerned citizens and friends of Mr. Keil". The marchers held out banners with slogans such as: "USA big bullies", "America: Free Joe", "We honor diplomatic passports", "Obama free Joe Keil" and "U.S. (Am)bassy release the truth from federal now! Or get out!".

Petition for the Department

13. Upon arriving at the Embassy, the protesters waited outside the ground floor of the ACC Building while two representatives, Mark Moors, President of the U.S. Veterans of Samoa Association, and Richard Keil, Joe Keil's brother, came up to our fifth floor office to deliver the petition calling for his release. The reps presented their petition to the Acting Charge who accepted on behalf of Ambassador McCormick and the Department. Meanwhile, on the ground floor the President of the Council of Churches, the Speaker of the House and others spoke to the rally. The two reps then addressed the marchers by stating that the Acting Charge accepted and will personally make sure copies are passed to the Department and had said he was surprised at the very large march. Then a prayer was said and the march disbanded.

Media

14. The media accompanied the march from start to finish. Two television stations (one owned by Joe Keil), radio and press reps also covered the event. No media were present at the handover of the petition. For weeks prior to the march,

numerous advertisements in the press and banners around Apia rallied support for the march. The march itself has had extensive coverage on Samoan TV news and in the press.

The Samoan Government's Role

15. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assisted in setting up police protection of the Embassy perimeter with strict instructions for the public not to enter Embassy property. There were at least a dozen police accompanying the march and one senior police officer was on the fifth floor Embassy the entire time. Police were cooperative and peaceful in controlling the crowd of nearly 2,000.

Comment: An insult to "little Samoa"

16. Some banners depicted anti-America sentiments, but the overall mood of the march was peaceful. However, the marchers told the media that a trust has been betrayed and Samoa has been insulted by this arrest of one of their leading citizens who was carrying a diplomatic passport at the time. Several embassy contacts report that there is a strong feeling over the perceived heavy-handedness by which his arrest and incarceration were carried out. There seems to be a feeling that if this were not "little Samoa" the incident would have been handled differently by the US. This peaceful protest has widespread support in the community although some have counseled a wait-and-see approach. Nevertheless. There may be some damage, at least in the short-term, to the US.- Samoa relationship in the eyes of the person on the street.

Transmittal of Petition

17. Post will forward to EAP/ANP and Embassy Wellington a copy of the petition which has approximately 2,500 names, mostly online sign-ups. We will send by email a scanned copy of the petition's demands.

CARTER